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1 **An integrated thermal sensation scale for estimating thermal strain in water**

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21

22 Acceptable definitions of thermal sensation for cold and hot water immersion do not  
23 exist. The use of subjective thermal sensation scales remains unsolved with broad  
24 psycho-physiological, and semantic implications. We hypothesize that perception of  
25 thermal sensation could be a valid and reliable indicator for thermal strain during  
26 exposure in water. We aimed to provide a theoretical background for behavioral  
27 thermoregulation and neurocognition to support an integrated thermal sensation scale  
28 for estimation of thermal load during head-out water immersion. This research used a  
29 mixed methods approach. Domains were identified and items were measured for  
30 thermal load to examine the content validity. Thereafter, we formed an integrated scale  
31 based on standard 10551 of International Organization for Standardization (ISO).  
32 Finally, we conducted a pilot study for the face validation of the scale based on a 30  
33 min head-out water immersion at 26°C in healthy adults (females, n=4; males, n=4; age:  
34 22.6 ± 8.0 years; body mass, 67.7 ± 9.5 kg; height, 169.0 ± 5.6 cm). We identified three  
35 aspects (environment, physiological and behavioral thermoregulation) and a total of 18  
36 items, of whom eight items (water temperature, immersion duration, core temperature,  
37 skin temperature, body heat storage, shivering, thermal sensation, and thermal comfort)  
38 were acceptable based on terms of scale-level content validity index (S-CVI = 92%).  
39 Conditions incorporated into our scale included: icy <12°C, cold 12-24°C, cool 24-  
40 29°C, neutral 29-38°C, warm 38-43°C, and hot >43°C. We found excellent face validity

### *Medical Hypotheses*

41 based on a reported homogenous cool feeling and physiological thermoregulatory  
42 responses. Our study revealed our model could reasonably characterize body thermal  
43 load though whole-body thermal sensation based on well-established thermoregulatory  
44 mechanisms during water immersion. Further research is needed to validate the  
45 accuracy of our behavioral model in a variety of water temperatures and in a larger  
46 sample size.

47 **Keywords:** whole-body water immersion, thermoregulation, thermal sensation, scale  
48 calibration

49 **Background**

50 Acceptable definitions of cold and hot water thermal sensation are not available. Prior  
51 work has not conclusively determined if thermal sensation can be used as a reliable  
52 indicator for estimating thermal strain during water exposure [1–4]. This problem is  
53 multidimensional, because of the difficulty in understanding the perceptual meaning of  
54 sensation, the variety of thermal scales and the difficulty in finding objective criteria  
55 that could separate physiological responses from cognitive interpretation (Auliciems,  
56 1981; Chatonnet & Cabanac, 1965; Lee et al., 2009; Schweiker et al., 2017). Metabolic  
57 heat production and body heat gain or loss are important for modulating behavior that  
58 motivates individuals to exit unbearable aquatic environments and could play a  
59 significant role for understanding a novel thermal perception model specifically while  
60 in water [2,9,10]. However, considering the challenges that affect the validity and  
61 reliability of subjective scales, such as type of scales (visual analog, categorical,  
62 numerical), number of categories, verbal descriptors, and leading question are  
63 important to understand [7,8,11,12].

64 Thermal perception is expressed as the conscious state of how a person  
65 perceives the external environment (i.e., sensation) influenced by skin and internal body  
66 temperature and discriminates into cognitive-emotional experience (i.e., pleasantness,  
67 comfort) and sensory experience (thermal sensation)(Fig. 1). Moreover, during water  
68 immersion skin temperature contributes around 40% and core temperature around 60%  
69 for whole-body temperature sensation. This ratio differs slightly in ambient conditions  
70 for comfort, as both core and skin temperature contributes equally [13,14]. Also,  
71 participants may be affected unconsciously by body heat storage that is reflected in  
72 thermoeffector output (e.g., core and shell temperature) to vote their temperature  
73 sensation [2,15]. Additionally, the pleasantness rating could provide useful information  
74 about an individual's thermal alliesthesial status (e.g., normothermia, hyperthermia,  
75 hypothermia) throughout the duration of water immersion [16].

76 Verbal anchoring phenomenon is often overlooked by many researchers, in  
77 which thermal choice was affected by the type of scale, numerals, and experimental  
78 conditions [1,3,8,17–24]. A typical verbal category universalizes the relationship  
79 among a width of sensory stimulus with physical (water temperature) or physiological  
80 parameters (e.g., body heat production, skin temperature), only when the  
81 thermoregulatory theorems are fulfilled [25] However, scaling for thermal sensation

82 remains an unresolved case with mathematical and semantic aspects significantly  
83 interplayed [8,11,19,24,26].

84         Alternatively, in psychometry, scaling of senses has been approached in a lot of  
85 ways depending on research aims [25,27]. In particular, according to the fractionation  
86 method, the fundamental infrastructure of a psychophysical scale, such as the inclusion  
87 of the midpoint and the number of points, was shaped with practicality and a  
88 satisfactory geometric or metric representation of the subjective feeling related to  
89 concrete range of thermal stimulus [25,28]. The main thrust of this scientific thinking,  
90 which was pursued by Lundgren et al. (2014), Glickman-Weiss et al. (1994), McIntyre  
91 (1976), and Rohles (2007), lined up to statistical procedures (e.g., Pearson correlation,  
92 ANOVA) with the aim of exhibiting a good fit to their thermal data. However, the above  
93 authors characterized intuitively each thermal anchoring, thereby underestimating the  
94 fallible nature of an abstract subjective measurement tool, such as visual analogue  
95 scales [1,20], and value of linguistic assessment information [18,21,22,25,29].

96         The axiomatization method highlights general fundamentals like that of human  
97 thermoregulation as followed in our research focused on the satisfaction of specific  
98 discrete measured properties, such as body heat storage, body temperature, and thermal  
99 perception [2,25,30]. With reference to the calibration of the ASHRAE and Bedford  
100 scales, selection of seven points was not set intuitively as occurred with language  
101 editing [9,22,25]. Indeed, the number seven stemmed from Miller's empirical  
102 observations about the absolute judgement of equal-spaced auditory signals about 15dB  
103 [25,27]. Nevertheless, the seven-categories conversion from pitch to thermal feeling  
104 arose from a scientific concept dated back to the 1950s, in which nerve cells decode  
105 and analyze all kind of senses (e.g., smell, sight, taste, temperature) exactly alike.  
106 Therefore, it was speculated that thermal sensation distributes equally at the same rate  
107 among operative temperatures [25,31]. Though, newer evidence contradicts the  
108 equidistance of the ASHRAE scale [8,32–34], probably due to uneven activation of the  
109 threshold thermoreceptors.

110         In general, thermosensing has a strong molecular basis, as it is recognized  
111 through transient receptor potential ion channels (TRPs) located on the surface of nerve  
112 cells. In general, the TRPs are listed according to temperature threshold activation in  
113 response to cold and warm [35]. The cold TRPs are TRPM8 (12-28°C), TRPC5 (24-  
114 37°C) and TRPA1 (<18°C) [36–40], and the warm TRPs are TRPV3 (30-37°C), TRPV4  
115 (28-42°C), TRPM3 (30-35°C), TRPM2 (38-42°C), and TRPV1 (>43°C) [37,39,41–45].

116 Activation of these TRP ion channels can be derived from temperature, pH, and  
117 chemicals (e.g., CO<sub>2</sub>, H<sub>2</sub>S, H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub>, common elements contained in thermal springs)  
118 [46,47].

119 During water immersion, it is advantageous to be able to assess an individual's  
120 thermal status during water immersion, in an efficient and non-invasive way to address  
121 health risk situations (e.g., accelerated hypothermia or hyperthermia) [21,48]. In the  
122 event of recovering a conscious victim from a rescue that can communicate, where time  
123 is limited and no access to heat evaluation equipment is available, it would be a useful  
124 tool to estimate thermal load via a thermal sensation scale [21]. However, if these  
125 subjective scales have many points of selection accompanying with metonym  
126 descriptors in situations of emergency, victims may not easily respond to them.

127 The purpose of this study is to provide a theoretical background for temperature  
128 regulation to develop an integrated thermal sensation scale, which would combine  
129 body, water, and environmental temperatures for the assessment of thermal status  
130 during water exposure in humans.

131

### 132 **Hypothesis**

133 Given the suggestive evidence of the fundamental laws of thermodynamics between  
134 body and environments, we hypothesize that thermal perception and thermal strain  
135 assessment could be validated and serve as reliable indicators, not only in terrestrial but  
136 also in aquatic environments [2,9]. This hypothesis is based on insights from a previous  
137 scoping review that found an association between basic thermal descriptors for  
138 temperature sensation and physiological thermoregulatory responses (e.g., body heat  
139 storage) during water immersion, in which they are triggered as a causal reaction of the  
140 activation of a range of TRPs' thermal thresholds, whose mechanism remains poorly  
141 understood [2]. To date, few studies have examined thermosensation in aquatic  
142 activities; while no attention has been given on the type of scale visual analog versus  
143 categorical scale, semiotic status of the lexemes upon each scale and their hermeneutics  
144 from the view of the participants and the external observers. We maintain our  
145 reservations about whether thermal sensation scales measure only thermal sensation,  
146 and not also thermal guessing [2]. Concerning number points and linguistic dimensions  
147 in a categorical scale, we believe that more than seven thermal categories and adjectival  
148 prepositions (e.g., slightly cool/warm) may confuse participants' choice affecting the  
149 validity of the mental experience evidencing thermal guessing and not thermal

150 sensation. The former is a similar but longer neurocognitive process that shares a  
151 common neural network with the evaluation of temperature feeling [2,12,49,50].  
152 Developing an integrated thermal sensation scale for water exposures may have  
153 practical application in real-world settings for spa workers, swimming coaches,  
154 lifeguards, if and only if, basic verbal descriptors upon the subjective scale reflect  
155 concrete thermal sensory experience while also accompanying discriminative  
156 biological patterns. In this case, we will select the temperature vocabulary for our scale  
157 according to the principle of discreteness and cross-linguistic after identifying the most  
158 common everyday linguistic elements for human temperature sensation [2,7,50] with  
159 the aim of being easily understood. So, this study provides a psychophysiological  
160 integration theory for real-time monitoring of thermal load in water via a simplistic  
161 approach that includes concrete perceptive words for thermal sensation and comfort  
162 evaluation.

163

#### 164 **Evaluation of Hypothesis**

165

166 To confirm our hypothesis, we needed to develop an integrated thermal sensation scale  
167 following a mixed methods approach that is separated into three phases. In the first  
168 phase we identified domains and items and examined their content validity for  
169 approximation of thermal strain for water exposure. In the second phase, we formed the  
170 integrated scale based on the ISO 10551 standard presenting the physiology of whole-  
171 body water immersion. In the third phase we conducted a pilot study for assessment its  
172 face validity and stability (test-retest design) utilizing 30 min head-out water  
173 immersions at 26°C in healthy females (n=4) and males (n=4) (age:  $22.6 \pm 8.0$  years,  
174 body mass:  $67.7 \pm 9.5$  kg, height:  $169.0 \pm 5.6$  cm) with no thermal injury and medical  
175 history. Written informed consent was given by all subjects who abstained from  
176 strenuous exercise, smoking, alcohol, and caffeine consumption 24 hours prior trials,  
177 while confirming a minimum of 6 hours sleep the previous night. The research protocol  
178 had been approved by the Ethics and Bioethics Committee of the School of Physical  
179 Education and Sport Science of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens  
180 (No 1162/12-02-2020) and was re-approved by the General Assembly of the Medical  
181 School of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (No 42100-4/5/2022).

182

183 First Phase: Domain-Item Identification & Content Validation

184 Initially, we determined the purpose of our rational thermal scale following the  
185 instructions of Boateng (2018), whose role was to predict not only the water  
186 temperature but also psychophysiological values. Using data from our previous scoping  
187 review we recognized three main dimensions: (i) environment, (ii) physiological  
188 thermoregulation, (iii) and behavioral thermoregulation [2]. The environment was  
189 defined as the physical quantities of weather (water and air temperature, humidity)  
190 affecting human body. Physiological thermoregulation was defined as mechanistic  
191 responses from an external or internal thermal stimulus. Behavioral thermoregulation  
192 was defined as conscious perception of thermal sensation and thermal comfort. Further,  
193 we analyzed all the factors for each dimension and compiled a form for being examined  
194 the content validity by a group of specialized scientists in the field of thermophysiology.

195 Content validation was performed by the primary author (MN). The content  
196 validation procedure, in which 18 items arranged into three domains (four items in  
197 environment domain, nine items in physiology, and five items in behavioral  
198 thermoregulation domain), and a panel of six scientists pursuing research on  
199 thermoregulation accepted to evaluate on a 4-point scale the relevance of each item to  
200 the measured domains after receiving a detailed content validation form (see Appendix  
201 A). The ordinal point scale characterized by 1 = not relevant, 2 = somewhat relevant,  
202 3 = quite relevant, and 4 = highly relevant. The content validity index computed for  
203 each item (I-CVI) and domain following the common practices [52]; setting the  
204 acceptable CVI value at 0.86. Also, overall scale validity index (S-CVI) was estimated  
205 prior and after modifications. After suggestions from two reviewer's we agreed to  
206 changes in the form and re-located an item from the physiological to behavioral domain.  
207 Ten items were excluded due to a very low I-CVI score varied from 0.16 to 0.67, as a  
208 result in improving at an excellent grade the S-CVI from 71% to 92%. Finally, only  
209 eight items satisfied the criteria (water temperature, duration immersion, core  
210 temperature, skin temperature, body heat storage, shivering, thermal sensation, and  
211 thermal comfort) (see Table 1).

212

213 Second Phase: Development of the integrated sensation scale based on ISO 10551.

214 According to the ISO 10551 standard we formulated a new thermal sensation scale  
215 based on the acceptable factors from content validation (see Fig. 2), with respect to  
216 theory about neural sensory capacity - in which humans estimate correctly a sense lesser  
217 to seven categorical levels - and with what is known about human thermoregulation and



218 thermal sensation in water for supporting the feasibility of an objective esthetic  
219 experience (Hensel, 1976; Hensel & Schafer, 1984; Luce & Krumhansl, 1988; Miller,  
220 1956; Ntoumani et al., 2023). Throughout the bibliography, we recognized six basic  
221 labels for temperature sensation: icy, cold, cool, neutral (neither cold nor warm), warm,  
222 hot, which constituted the thermal glossary for our scale. The “icy”, though it was not  
223 included in ASHRAE vocabulary, we added as an extreme antonym of the hot endpoint  
224 more suitable to represent extreme environmental stimuli [9,17,18,53–55]. Every  
225 anchor was superimposed with molecular (TRPs) and physiological responses (body  
226 heat, storage, core, and skin temperature) after 30 min of immersion. An acute 30 min  
227 immersion was selected mostly due to normothermic status at 26°C that allowed us to  
228 focus on the cornerstone role of skin thermoreceptors that theoretically contributed  
229 mostly to thermal sensation [14,56]. Regarding visualization of body heat storage, the  
230 thermal physiologist ER used the available raw data from Craig and Dvorak (1968) for  
231 a range of water temperatures for spotlighting its causal association with conscious  
232 responses [2].

233         Summarizing our data, we found a specific biological motif in the icy zone  
234 <12°C where the core and body temperature declined. Though, the lack of evidence of  
235 whole-body thermal sensation in extreme cold water temperatures suggests a  
236 deteriorated feeling shift away from the “cold”. We represented icy as a lower  
237 temperature range than the cold anchoring. Also, in the icy zone, we observed the cold  
238 shock response accompanied by hyperventilation, increased heart rate and maximal  
239 oxygen consumption owing to reflex activation of the sympathetic nervous system by  
240 rapid changes of the skin thermal afferents. Besides, there was a high risk of cold  
241 injuries, such as frostbite, which was assessed by finger skin temperature ( $T_{Fsk} < 7^\circ\text{C}$ )  
242 and time-onset. Indeed, some unacclimatized naked subjects could not afford this  
243 noxious water temperatures even for 10 minutes [57–62]. Another highlighted  
244 observation, according to the thermal model of Mekjavic and Morrison (1985), was the  
245 complete inactivation of cold thermoreceptors below 12°C; indeed, TRPA1 expressed  
246 in C fibers stopped working at 12°C, while those expressed in Ad fibers were still  
247 working at this concrete temperature range as appeared in Fig. 2 (Wang & Siemens,  
248 2015; Zygmunt & Högestätt, 2014). Whole-body water immersion in the cold zone  
249 reduced rectal body temperature, but not necessarily esophageal temperature; while it  
250 evoked bradycardia, activation of the parasympathetic system and shivering  
251 thermogenesis, mainly due to the action of TRPM8 [59,65–68]. In the cool zone, only

252 shivering sensation appeared within the first 30 minutes, while no changes were  
253 observed to core temperature and other cardiovascular factors, such as oxygen  
254 consumption [57,59,67]. The function of TRPM8 in synergy with TRPC5 may be  
255 responsible for attenuated thermoregulatory response [38,39]. The neutral zone is a  
256 dynamic intermediate state not presenting shivering thermogenesis, sweating activity,  
257 and last but not least, changes in body temperature [57]. The human body has a very  
258 sophisticated construction and function for its survival mirroring, on a molecular level,  
259 in the complexity of neutral TRPs, as we spend the most of our time in indoor  
260 thermoneutral places. In the warm zone, sweating rate, total dry heat loss, metabolic  
261 alkalosis, core temperature, and heart rate were increased, possibly due to the action of  
262 TRPV4 and TRPM2's action [14,41,69–74]. Simultaneously, we set the hot zone  
263 mainly by the unbearable pain and discomfort caused by the warm TRPV1 ion channel  
264 and the inability to complete an acute whole-body water immersion [75–78]. According  
265 to epidemiological studies, hot baths (>43°C) was deemed deleterious due to the danger  
266 of thermal injuries (burns, skin necrosis) and drowning – especially for prolonged  
267 immersion [75,77,79].

268

269 Third phase: Face Validation

270 A test-retest design was followed to examine the face validity of the integrated  
271 sensation scale, and its stability. Two repeated sessions, separated by at least one week,  
272 were compared in this study. Participants immersed in a constant water of 26°C at the  
273 shoulder level for 30 minutes. Each male participant wore a competitive swimsuit while  
274 females wore a two-piece swimsuit. Prior and after water immersion, volunteers rested  
275 in a sitting position for 5 minutes at an ambient indoor pool temperature of  $25.4 \pm 1.5^\circ\text{C}$   
276 (Thomas Traceable Memory Digital Thermometer, VWR Scientific, USA) and  $61.8 \pm$   
277  $6.3\%$  relative humidity (Mi Temperature and Humidity Monitor 2, Xiaomi, China) for  
278 baselines measurements. On each trial, core temperature ( $T_{\text{core}}$ : Thermoscan 5, Braun ,  
279 Germany), skin temperature on the right side of four body locations: forehead, chest,  
280 hand, and thigh ( $T_{\text{skin}}$ : DS-273 1922L iButton, Maxim Integrated, USA) - that were  
281 taped with a transpore medical material (Tegaderm, 3M Health Care, USA) and  
282 calculated from the equation of Ramanathan (1964). Perception measurements were  
283 recorded every 5 min intervals prior, during, and after immersion. First, we evaluated  
284 firstly thermal sensation using our integrated scale (TS6), then assessed comfort  
285 judgment using the ASHRAE 4-point comfort scale (TC) (Gagge et al. 1967). The

286 leading question for thermal sensation was *How do you perceive water?* followed by  
287 the leading question for thermal comfort *How comfortable do you feel in water/ambient*  
288 *environment now?*

289

### 290 **Data Analysis**

291 Perception scales are ordinal (6-point and 4-point), therefore non-parametric statistics  
292 were selected. Shapiro–Wilk’s and Levene’s tests were used to check the normality and  
293 the homogeneity of all data prior to analyses. Wilcoxon matched-pairs ranked test was  
294 conducted for nonparametric data (thermal perception) every 5-min interval. For  
295 normal data, we applied one-way repeated ANOVA, or Welch ANOVA when equal  
296 variance assumption was not satisfied, at each time point for identifying any  
297 physiological alteration followed by a post-hoc Bonferroni analysis for ANOVA or  
298 Games-Howel analysis for Welch ANOVA, if needed. We set the significance level at  
299  $p < 0.05$ . Face validity of the 6-point integrated scale was examined only by asking the  
300 participants how they felt in indoor pool. As no statistical analysis was supported for  
301 this kind of validity, we associated observed body and environmental temperatures, that  
302 were in line with the theoretical background of it.

303

### 304 **Empirical Data**

305 Environmental factors were equivalent between test-retest trials except from relative  
306 humidity ( $p < 0.01$ ) that reduced the second time trial clapping from  $65.4 \pm 7.5\%$  to  
307  $58.3 \pm 5.2\%$ . Tympanic temperature (test  $F(7, 56) = 0.639$   $p > 0.722$  vs retest  $F(7, 56) =$   
308  $0.069$   $p > 0.784$ ), heart rate (test  $F(7, 46) = 1.127$   $p > 0.563$ , vs retest  $F(7, 46) = 1.652$   
309  $p > 0.121$ ) and skin temperature (test  $F(7, 56) = 86.272$   $p < 0.001$ , vs retest  $[F(7,56) =$   
310  $58.237$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) sustained stable between repetitions during water immersion. There  
311 was a time-effect only on skin temperature and thermal perception, as these parameters  
312 significantly changed in pre- and post-immersion compared to water immersion  
313 duration ( $p < 0.05$ ). For all physiological and perceptual values, there was no  
314 statistically significant difference between first and second set of trials ( $p > 0.05$ ). The  
315 face validity of the integrated thermal sensation scale was excellent as proved by a  
316 homogenous cool and slightly uncomfortable feeling in water for all measurements  
317 without any alteration of core temperature as demonstrated in Fig. 3.

318

### 319 **Consequences of the hypothesis and discussion**

320 Our pilot study substantiates the hypothesis of the objective truth of thermal sensation,  
321 in which water temperature could approximate thermal perception and body heat stress  
322 and vice versa yielded to causal psychophysiological schema (Fig. 2). Our scale was  
323 developed according to well-established neurophysiological and cognitive mechanisms  
324 and divided into six temperature ranges: icy <12°C, cold 12-24°C, cool 24-29°C, neutral  
325 29-38°C, warm 38-43°C and hot >43°C (Fig. 2). The fixed temperature ranges  
326 represented the water temperature that coincided with the skin temperature of the  
327 immersed body parts. The main findings of this experiment were the homogeneity of  
328 thermoregulatory responses during the 30-minute immersion at 26°C, which were  
329 aligned with the predictions of our behavioral thermoregulatory model. Of particular  
330 interest was the common verbal expression of the thermal perception by all subjects,  
331 selecting the basic descriptor "cool" for thermal sensation and "slightly uncomfortable"  
332 for thermal comfort.

333 As previously reported, skin temperature is the principal input for thermal  
334 sensation for a normothermic resting subject being consistent with our collective field  
335 data [9,14,18]. When the mean body  $T_{sk}$  is within a range of TRP ion channels as tuning  
336 with water temperature due to conduction heat exchange, a synergistic effect between  
337 epidermal TRPs take place for the formation of thermosensation in the central level  
338 according to combinatorial coding strategy [81,82]. The rate coding hypothesis, which  
339 analyzes neural activity as the frequency of cold and warm thermoreceptors' firing rates  
340 [83], was followed by Kingma et al. (2012) to advance a mathematical  
341 neurophysiological model for thermal sensation. Even this model was alleged for its  
342 accuracy for  $\pm 0.5$ -scale unit in the ASHRAE scale, a perusal of time-to-event data of  
343 thermal sensation votes disclose a greater discrepancy. This may be due to structural  
344 failure, as it did not account TRPs temperature sensors, equalized the coding strategy  
345 between mammals (e.g. cat) and higher species like man, and limited predicted range  
346 for ambient air temperatures above 12°C [9,56,82,83]. On the other side of specificity  
347 rate coding, we proposed the concept of population coding that allow the combinatorial  
348 co-activation of differential expression of skin TRPs that crosstalk with other somatic  
349 cells in central or periphery level to explain the psychophysiological pattern of  
350 temperature discrimination threshold [82,84]. That is, during water immersion at 26°C  
351 in our study, some cool sensitive ion channels were triggered primarily from skin  
352 thermal stimuli, enforcing even more this signal from the cool-mechanical afferents

353 provoking from muscle tremor during shivering thermogenesis, mostly observed in  
354 unacclimatized participants [2,84].

355 Particular attention is needed to devote to linguistic editing of thermal  
356 categories, chiefly to the escalation of the semantic nuance of the basic thermal  
357 adjectives [19,24,55]. Indeed, adjectival descriptors (much too, too, comfortably,  
358 slightly) that accompanied basic temperature terms (cool, neutral, warm) as for example  
359 in the ASHRAE and Glickman-Weiss scale may further strengthened the amorphous  
360 tendency of thermal sensation possibly resulting in a greater discrepancy and  
361 measurement uncertainty among conscious responses [56,11,19,24,55,12,34,8,50]. It is  
362 quite common voters to focus more on the central values than on the extremities upon  
363 a scale e.g., selecting more easily “slightly cool” and then the “cool” anchor, when  
364 rating near thermoneutral zone affecting by temperature, immersion duration and  
365 personal characteristics. The cool temperature stimuli were expressed verbally identical  
366 among all the subjects upon the 6-point thermal sensation scale, while in previous  
367 studies, in which thermal sensitivity was rated using other sensorial scales has shown a  
368 variety range from “cool” to “neutral” [2,12,34,56]. Furthermore, time response  
369 increases as more increases the number of points and may steer to erroneous making-  
370 decisions and may threaten the validity of thermal sensation [2,27,85].

371 Hitherto, conscious temperature judgment was supposed purely subjective in  
372 water, ergo a poor indicator for body heat stress due to the absence or underestimation  
373 of a mathematical connection of thermal perception with biometeorological factors  
374 (e.g., ambient and body temperature) [4,83]. Indeed, methodological (e.g., water  
375 temperature, thermal sensation scale), statistical designs and correlational analysis  
376 either have violated some assumptions or have overridden holistic theoretical  
377 knowledge with a consequence to fail to capture the whole “true” empirical evidence  
378 for thermal sensation [1,3,4,56,63,83]. For example, Phik correlation coefficient, which  
379 never has been used in behavioral thermoregulation studies, is working well both with  
380 categorical (e.g., thermal sensation, comfort) and interval data (e.g., core and skin  
381 temperature) appearing as an either linear or non-linear relationship. This tool allows  
382 us to compare ‘apple and oranges’, but its calculation requires expensive software and  
383 complex calculations [86]. Overall, we cohered theoretical with empirical  
384 measurements about behavioral and physiological thermoregulation, as changes in  
385 sensory cognitive performance during passive thermal stress are significantly

386 associated with changes in thermophysiological variables of individuals (Kingma et al.,  
387 2020).

388

### 389 **Limitations**

390 The proposed integrated scale was superimposed exclusively with data during under  
391 water exposure. In the present pilot study, we had checked only for face validity;  
392 however, it is required a full validation of the scale using a greater variety of air and  
393 water temperatures, while measuring temperatures in body and environment with  
394 precise instruments than we had selected. Furthermore, a stronger design, to assess body  
395 heat storage would include indirect calorimetry to measure metabolic heat production.  
396 Additionally, Type I & II errors on Likert scales with no equivalent distances such as  
397 in thermal sensation scales, e.g., ASHRAE scale, were usually derived from  
398 misapplication of parametric statistics (t-test, ANOVA, Pearson correlation), anchoring  
399 points, instrument sensitivity, and a reduced power [8,26,34,50]. Therefore, these  
400 should have been taken altogether in serious consideration for a full validation of the  
401 integrated sensation scale.

402

### 403 **Implications**

404 Using a thermal perception scale that is capable of estimating thermal strain could help  
405 medical doctors and aquatic practitioners to prescribe aquatic exercise for concrete rate  
406 of water temperature ranges. For example, if a swimmer with multiple sclerosis or  
407 cardiac failure feels the water as “warm” from the beginning, this means that water  
408 temperature is above the thermoneutral spot and can worsen his clinical symptoms.  
409 Feeling the warmth sensation during exercise in cool water following our temperature  
410 classification could be translated into an increasement of body heat storage. Thermal  
411 sensation may act as an alarming precaution for coaches to modify the daily training  
412 (e.g., by reducing intensity and increasing rest) for a safe and beneficial aquatic session.  
413 Another application is in the lifeguarding domain, where a deterioration of coldness of  
414 the sea bather may indicate the probability of hypothermia, when meteorological  
415 conditions and immersion duration are already known. Montgomery’s work is one of  
416 the most well-established thermophysiological model to predict somatic reactions (e.g.,  
417 shivering, core and skin temperature) for head-in and head-out water activities applying  
418 mostly for military purposes [87]. However, our data may be useful for the  
419 advancement of such model’s equations to evaluate additionally thermal sensation and

420 comfort. From an ecological perspective, there is an urgent need to develop such a  
421 simulated thermal perception tool to regulate thermal energy demands of pools for a  
422 healthy comfortable working environment bearing in mind its main usage (e.g., leisure  
423 activities, rehabilitation programs, sport), because its role determines the minimum  
424 operational water temperature, and energy savings. Clearly, the type of sensation scales  
425 (e.g., integrated 6-point, 7-point or 9-point extended ASHRAE) should be taken into  
426 account by thermal modelers, as it influences the estimations for desired ambient  
427 occasions [12,34]. Finding the optimal number of categories upon a scale for an easy  
428 and valid thermal sensation measurement requires further studies to be conducted in a  
429 variety of water temperatures, with greater sample size, also, measuring, if applicable,  
430 body heat storage and time response via eye-tracking technology.

431

### 432 **Conclusion**

433 Our main finding supports our initial hypothesis that thermal expression capable of  
434 predicting human thermoregulatory responses. In general terms, sensory phenomenon  
435 for temperature in terms of neural events, physiological and psychological responses is  
436 complex. What is new on our thermal sensation model is inclusion of the brand new  
437 concept about temperature threshold of TRPs for providing a theoretical framework on  
438 thermal perception, especially in the steady state. We critically analyze thermal votes  
439 within the context of environmental physiology, neurophysiology, and psychometry.  
440 These preliminary results suggest that the 6-point integrated sensation scale appeared a  
441 homogenous sense among participants during water immersion duration with an  
442 acceptable predictability for water and thermophysiological indices. A shift on the  
443 central thermal votes (e.g., from cool to neutral) may be sensitive enough for the  
444 detection of a thermoeffector alteration i.e., body heat storage during water immersion  
445 duration. Our study revealed that our model could characterize body thermal load  
446 though whole-body thermal sensation based on well-established thermoregulatory  
447 mechanisms during water immersion. Further research will be needed to validate the  
448 accuracy of our behavioral model in a variety of water temperatures and in larger  
449 sample size.

450

451

452

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454 Funding not received for the study.

455

456

457

458

459 **Ethical Approval**

460 The research protocol had been approved by the Ethics and Bioethics Committee of the

461 School of Physical Education and Sport Science at the National and Kapodistrian

462 University of Athens (No 1162/12-02-2020).

463

464



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540 [origsite=gscholar&cbl=34619](https://www.proquest.com/openview/d845a829adbd3f864b71fd96b233686a/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=34619)

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- 691  
692

693 **Table 1.** I-CVI and S-CVI of the 6-point integrated scale.

**Identification of the thermoregulatory factors to assess heat stress**

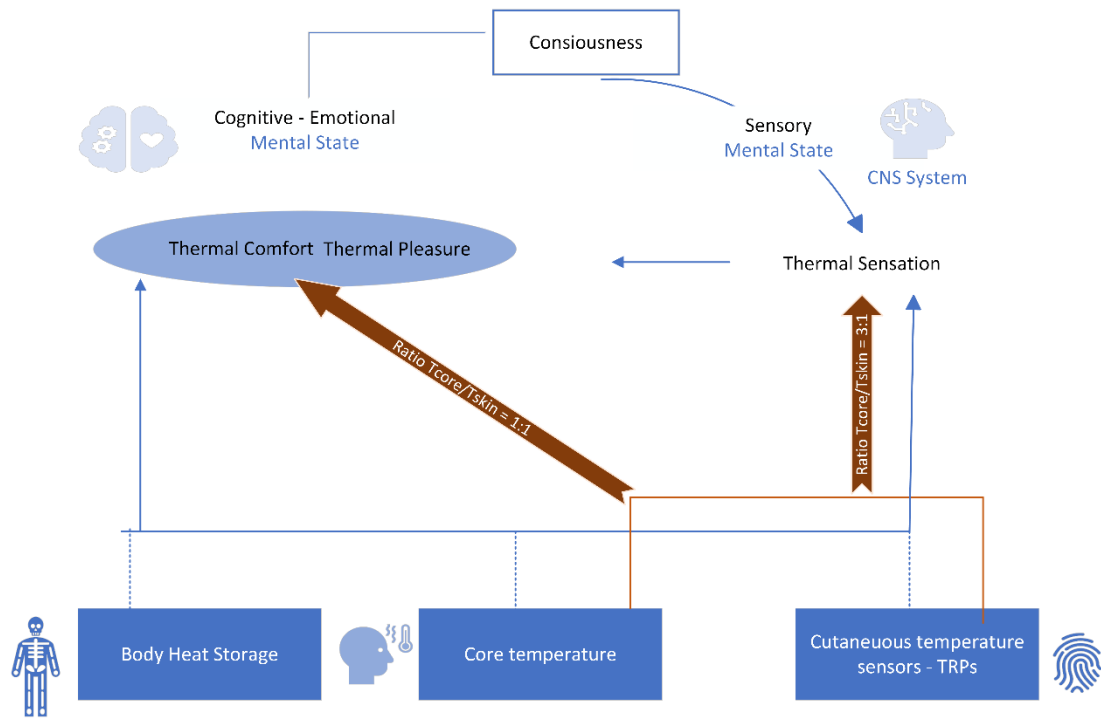
Listed below are some factors for assessing thermal stress during whole-body water immersion

- Please indicate the appropriateness of factors to measure thermal sensation (Domain 1 & 2) or thermal stress (Domain 3):

	1	2	3	4	CVI
	the item is not relevant	the item is somewhat relevant	the item is quite relevant	the item is highly relevant	
<b>1. Domain: <i>Environment</i></b>					
<b>1</b>	Water temperature				<b>1.00</b>
<b>2</b>	Air temperature				<b>0.71</b>
<b>3</b>	Humidity				<b>0.57</b>
<b>4</b>	Duration immersion				<b>0.86</b>
<b>2. Domain: <i>Physiological Thermoregulation</i></b>					
<b>5</b>	Core temperature				<b>0.86</b>
<b>6</b>	Skin temperature				<b>0.86</b>
<b>7</b>	Body Heat Storage				<b>0.86</b>
<b>8</b>	Heart rate				<b>0.29</b>
<b>9</b>	Ventilation				<b>0.29</b>
<b>10</b>	Shivering				<b>1.00</b>
<b>11</b>	Sweating				<b>0.57</b>
<b>12</b>	Pain				<b>0.57</b>
<b>13</b>	TRP's (transient receptor potential ion channels)				<b>0.71</b>
<b>14</b>	Thermal Injuries				<b>0.57</b>
<b>3. Domain: <i>Subjective - Behavioral Thermoregulation</i></b>					
<b>15</b>	Thermal Neutral Zone				<b>0.57</b>
<b>16</b>	Thermal Comfort Zone				<b>0.57</b>
<b>17</b>	Thermal sensation				<b>0.86</b>
<b>18</b>	Thermal comfort				<b>0.86</b>
	<b>S-CVI</b>				<b>0.70</b>
	<b>S-CVI (after removal factors with I-CVI &lt; 0.57)</b>				<b>0.92</b>

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695

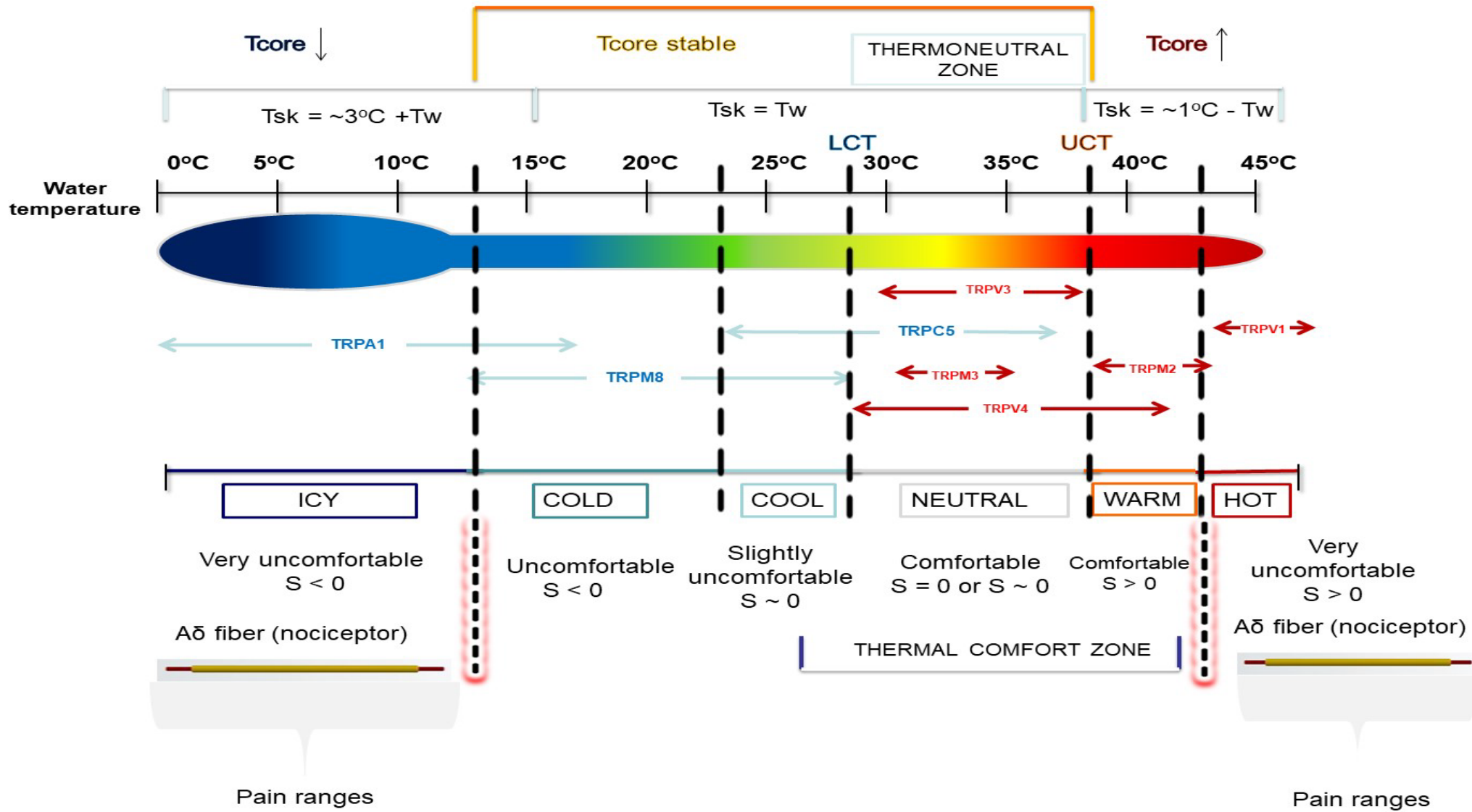


696

697 Figure 1. Thermoeffector relationship between physiological indices and conscious mental  
698 state

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701 **Fig. 2** depicts TRP ion channels activation matched with our 6-point thermal scale. Each selected temperature ranges has been chosen depending  
702 on how a subject expressed his own thermal sensation after a 30 min water immersion and with what is known about the activation of TRP ion  
703 channels. TRP, transient receptor potential channel; Tsk, skin temperature; Tcore, Core body temperature; S, heat storage; LCT, lower critical  
704 temperature; HCT, higher critical temperature (Ntoumani et al., 2022).

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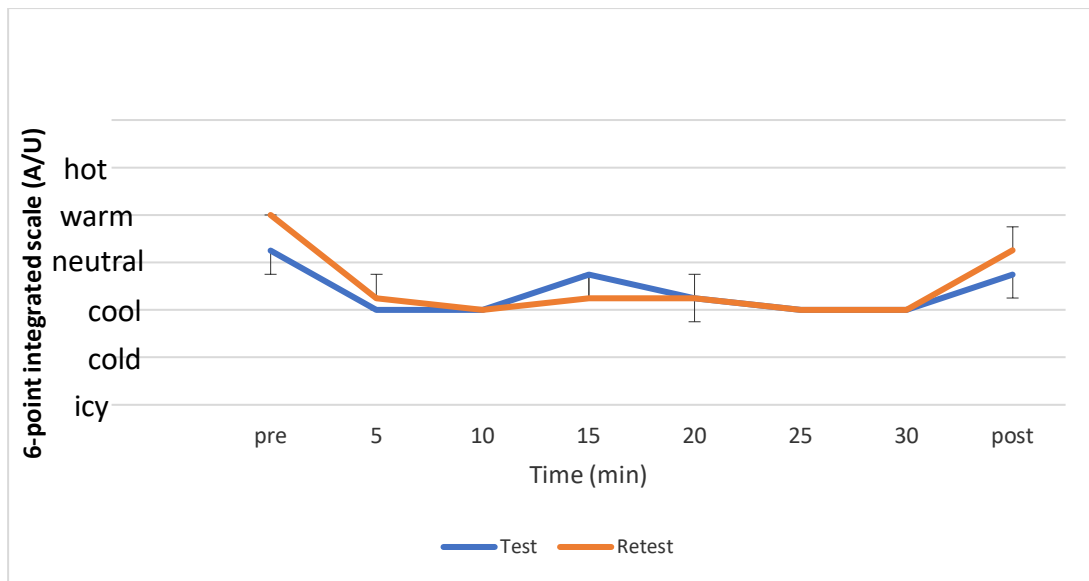


Figure 3. Time-course of thermal sensation votes based on the 6-point integrated sensation scale during the experiment; Mean $\pm$  SE.